



Lexington Public Schools

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Our Schools

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A public school education is the foundation of our democracy. Successful schools must educate our children to be effective citizens, not only on the local, state, and national levels, but also on a global level. Although many communities might argue over what this type of education should look like, Lexington has been setting the standard for what a comprehensive education should be for decades.

The bedrock of our public schools' reputation has been our dedicated staff and the outstanding curriculum they have developed. Combined with a diverse and highly motivated student body and community, the results have been impressive. In recent years, our high school in particular has been nationally recognized as first rank, and our two middle schools ranked first and second in the nation for mathematics. But, the current fiscal environment could change all of this.

Over the years, Lexington teachers and staff have developed a series of programs that reflect the values of this community. Our long-standing elementary foreign language program was the pillar of a curriculum whose effectiveness could be measured by the myriad of students graduating from high school having achieved full fluency, prepared for international communication, learning, and business. Likewise, our free elementary instrumental music program was integral to the caliber of our award-winning musical programs at the middle and high school levels.

For more than 40 years, Lexington high school students have had six blocks of instruction per week in science, enabling students at all levels to complete a comprehensive lab-based curriculum. It is this type of instruction and dedication that made it possible for Arjun Ramamurti to be the only student of the six finalists in the prestigious Siemens Math, Science and Technology Competition to achieve this level of success without the active support of a local university. Our 30 year-old debate program involves 112 students and continues to compete at the highest levels. Just recently, the team hosted its widely praised annual national tournament.

For many years, Lexington has provided many programs like these while maintaining a lower cost per pupil than comparable communities. Developing and sustaining such programs requires time and consistent resources.

Unfortunately, budgetary constraints and fiscal downturns have forced us to eliminate our elementary Spanish language program, increase elementary class size, levy fees for instrumental music, reduce science instruction to five periods per week, and cut the debate budget to a point that the program's survival is dependent on extensive fund-raising by students and parents. At all levels, students are spending less one-on-one time with teachers because teachers now teach more classes, and the teaching staff has been reduced. We have been forced to make these cuts in order to preserve even more basic educational services: class sizes appropriate for grade level and subject, the quality of faculty and staff, and the health and safety that our buildings and staff provide all our students.

The following table highlights the major budget cuts this past year:

Subject	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
English			Elimination of teaming with social studies teachers has decreased meeting time for teachers and parents, and increased number of at-risk students who may “fall through the cracks”
Math	Some required math materials are now provided by parents		Increased teaching load by 25% (4 to 5 classes, up to 125 students)
Science			Reduced Biology, Chemistry and Physics from 6 to 5 classes per week for all but AP level students, which required the elimination of 17% of the curriculum
Social Studies	Elimination of Social Studies Coordinator position		Increased teaching load by 25% (4 to 5 classes, up to 125 students) Debate travel budget cut, making the program almost totally dependent on private donations
All subjects	Loss of one K-5 teacher and two needed teachers has resulted in larger class sizes	Inability to hire additional teachers has resulted in lack of full-time staff for certain subjects	
Foreign Language	Elimination of Grade 3-5 Spanish language program		Increased teaching load by 25% (4 to 5 classes, up to 125);
Art	Unable to hire K-5 visual art coordinator to increase efficiency of departments	Reduced number of sections has resulted in larger classes	Unable to provide a .25 recommended position of Chair of Visual Arts. Performing Arts Department Chair must cover fine arts, music, and drama.
Music	Elimination of free instrumental music reduced program participation (participation dropped by 1/3)		
Health and Human Services	Did not increase preschool nursing despite influx of children with serious medical challenges	Loss of early intervention and social worker at Clarke means that some problems which could be prevented may surface in the high school	Unable to add needed health services
Technology	Loss of technology specialists responsible for integration of computers and technology into the existing curriculum	Loss of technology specialists to integrate technology into existing curriculum	Loss of technology specialists to integrate technology into existing curriculum
Professional Development	Loss of professional development services Unable to provide induction program for new and junior teachers		

My job as Superintendent is to find a way to support needed programs like these in a fiscally responsible way. Unfortunately, the failure to pass last June's \$2.6 million override question for school services, coupled with years of reduced state and federal aid, has forced us to reduce or abolish the programs described above, which have been vital parts of a Lexington education.

The process is somewhat analogous to any professional seeking to maintain excellence, but being forced to cut corners year after year. Federal and state laws certainly define a basic education, but a Lexington education has never been simply about satisfying minimum standards. We have always operated distinctive educational programs for children of all abilities that prepare them to be personally successful and to be responsible citizens in an ever more complex, technology-driven, and globalized world. With your support, we hope to continue to do so.

I encourage everyone to visit the LPS Website (<http://lps.lexingtonma.org/>) to review my FY 08 budget recommendation. This recommendation does not attempt to restore most of the budget cuts listed above. It seeks to maintain the current (already reduced) educational program. The budget document includes statements written by the department heads and principals that describe the impact of the lost services to students. By examining the direct source material, you can obtain a more in-depth understanding of our schools and our goals. I encourage you to learn as much about the FY08 budget as possible. Then, please share your thoughts with the School Committee. By working together, we can best utilize our limited financial resources.